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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics
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FARM WAGE SURVEYS OF THE BUREAU
OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

Recognizing the need for more information relating to farm labor problems, Congress has provided funds to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics to gather facts on the wages and wage rates of farm laborers throughout the country. Wages and wage conditions are important to both the farmers and farm laborers in their wartime jobs of producing food, and will be of concern in the post-war period.

One objective of the farm-wage surveys is to improve the basic series on farm-wage rates now issued by the Bureau, through shifting to a basis of reporting on wages actually paid by the person reporting and through obtaining data from enumerative surveys. Another objective is developing information regarding the numbers of workers at different wage levels, the wage rates for specialized jobs or operations, the hours worked by farm laborers, and hourly and daily earnings. It is necessary to know what rates are being paid, what perquisites are being given; how rates differ for seasonal and regular hired workers, how they differ as between older and younger workers and between men and women. If the job is at piecework, it is necessary to know the length of time worked at the job or the amount of work that can be done if we are to know how much workers really earned at specified rates. Averages alone are not enough, for many workers are above and many are below the average, in any locality. Using the new basis of reporting farm wage data and gathering the new types of information will make for much greater comparability with industrial wage statistics than has been possible before.

These farm-wage surveys will provide information on wages and earnings of an important segment of the Nation's workers during peak wartime employment. The survey will also include the development of data on differences in wages in relation to specialization in agriculture and farm jobs. The development of more specific wage information in relation to labor costs for particular crops will be useful in connection with studies of farmers' costs and the problems of parity prices and parity income.

The information to be provided through this project will assist considerably in recruitment, placement, and transportation programs in regard to farm laborers. It will also help farmers and workers to decide on wages and wage agreements, and may assist in preventing or settling labor disputes. It will be useful to farmers, farm workers, the Government, and the public generally in understanding and dealing with problems of farm wages and wage rates.

Expansion of the Bureau's program of collection and analysis of statistics on agricultural wages and wage rates is proceeding along four lines which include:

(1) Quarterly national enumerative surveys of farm wage rates paid on approximately 20,000 farms in a sample of 158 counties, to yield estimates by major regions;

(2) Special surveys of seasonal wage rates in selected special-crop areas which have high labor requirements for harvest operations;

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(3) Expanded mail-questionnaire surveys to afford State estimates on a basis comparable with those for regions from the enumerative surveys;

(4) Analysis of special data on domestic migratory agricultural workers and imported foreign workers, obtained and made available through cooperation of the Office of Labor, WFA.

The first national quarterly survey will be made during the last week of March. The enumerators will obtain data from the farmer on wages paid, wage rates, and time worked by hired workers on his own farm. Schedules will be edited and posted in the offices of the State Statisticians and will then be sent to Washington. Preliminary estimates will be promptly derived from these tabulations and released, and more detailed cross-tabulations will be released later in special reports.

Surveys are already under way in Florida, Texas, and California, to gather information about wage rates for the major harvest operations of selected crops in special production areas. Results of the first of these will be released at an early date. It will include information on wage rates—hourly, daily, and weekly earnings of orange, grapefruit, and tangerine pickers in the principal citrus-producing area of Florida. Preliminary reports of these special surveys will be issued soon after each survey is completed, and the preliminary results from all areas will be brought together each month in the Farm Labor Report. More detailed and comparative analyses of these surveys will be issued in special reports in Washington.

A special mailing list of approximately 100,000 farmers is being worked out to receive the mailed questionnaires. The making of these questionnaire surveys is to be synchronized with the national enumerative surveys to furnish a method of adjustment for possible "response bias" in questionnaire returns, and to furnish a method of getting on the State level the new types of data that will be available for regions, from the enumerative surveys.

Special surveys are being made in cooperation with the WFA covering wages received, time worked, and earnings of domestic migratory agricultural workers that are housed in Labor Supply Centers of the War Food Administration in important special-crop areas of Florida and Texas. Tabulations of hours they are working, wages, and earnings for a sample of all foreign workers that have been brought in from other countries will be made for the same week in March as the national survey. Some of the results will be used in the reports described and others will form the basis for special reports.

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